

Letter to the New York Times from Diane Kunz, Center for Adoption Policy, in Response to August 3, 2010 Article “After Haiti Quake, the Chaos of U.S. Adoptions” by Ginger Thompson

We read with dismay this account of the humanitarian parole program which brought 1,150 Haitian children already in the process of adoption by U.S. parents to this country in the wake of Haiti’s devastating earthquake. This article both erroneously describes the actions taken happened in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake under the stewardship of Michele Bond from the Department of State, Lauren Kielsmeier from the Department of Homeland Security and Sharon Parrott from the Department of Health and Human Services, *and* omits the crucial follow-up procedures that U.S. government officials instituted thereafter.

Unlike the cited Vietnam “Baby Lift” of 1975, the humanitarian parole program was not a mass exodus but a justified response to a geographical catastrophe, undertaken by the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security, with the permission of the highest officials of the Haitian government. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration officers in Washington and Port-au-Prince weighed every application for humanitarian parole against the criteria of availability of the applicant child for adoption and suitability of the adoptive family to parent a child. Many applications for humanitarian parole that did not meet these criteria were denied. These were extraordinary procedures but thoroughly appropriate ones given the tragic situation unfolding in Haiti.

Once here, the Haitian children were placed in the legal custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement of HHS. ORR and other HHS officials from have provided support and worked with the sponsor families, especially those experiencing problems. Gratefully, so far the number of estimated disruptions (around 20 out of 1, 150) is extremely low; typically 10 to 15 percent of adoptions disrupt with an approximate 25 percent disruption rate for teenage adoption. ([http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s\\_disrup.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s_disrup.cfm))

Sponsors seeking to adopt children in the U.S. are not “going to show up in court and hope he [the judge] takes my word for it...” Officials from the DHS and HHS, as well as from the American Bar Association, university faculty, the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys and the Center for Adoption Policy have worked to create the proper legal framework for these children to obtain final adoptions and U.S. legal permanent residence, to be followed by citizenship.

We believe that adoption must be honest, transparent and ethical and focus on the best interests of children. In this case, U.S. government officials did all that was possible to uphold these standards.

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